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DE RUEHBO #2597/01 1992254
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 172254Z JUL 08
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3657
INFO RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 0736
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ JUL 9558
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 6390
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 7063
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 4498
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAWJC/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS BOGOTA 002597

SENSITIVE
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FOR S/P DIRECTOR GORDON FROM THE AMBASSADOR

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KJUS](#) [PREL](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER: VISIT OF POLICY PLANNING DIRECTOR,
DR. DAVID F. GORDON

¶1. (U) Your visit comes as Colombia celebrates major victories in its fight against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), continued strong economic growth, and an expansion of democratic governance. Increased security has led to an economic boom that has reduced poverty by 20 percent since 2002, cut unemployment by 25 percent, and attracted record levels of investment. Almost 48,000 combatants, mostly paramilitaries, have laid down their arms and are participating in GOC reintegration programs. The captures or kills of key FARC leaders, the audacious rescue of 15 high-profile FARC hostages--including three Americans--and rising desertions have weakened Colombia's largest terrorist group.

¶2. (SBU) Still, serious challenges remain as Colombia consolidates the progress achieved to date. Socio-economic inequality, weak GOC presence especially in rural areas, and narcotrafficking will continue to require substantial GOC attention and investment. Nonetheless, a more secure, confident Colombia will play a larger role on regional and international issues. Our continued commitment to Colombia--through approval of the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Act (CTPA) and support for Plan Colombia--will help lock in Colombia's democratic security gains, promote regional stability, and create a Colombia that is a regional and international force for deeper economic integration, enhanced security cooperation, and stronger democratic institutions. End Summary.

Successes of Democratic Security Policy

¶3. (U) President Uribe's democratic security policy and free market economic reforms have created a more secure environment and spurred the economy. Since 2002, homicides have decreased by 40% -- its lowest point in twenty years -- while kidnappings have declined by 76%. GDP growth exceeded 7.5 percent in 2007, but is expected to return to its recent average of 5 percent amid a slowing global economy in 2008. Colombia's trade volume has grown more than 65 percent since 2003. The United States remains Colombia's largest trade partner (approximately 34 percent of exports and 26 percent of imports). In 2007, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) exceeded \$7.5 billion, 350 percent greater than FDI in 2002.

¶4. (SBU) The GOC created the Centro de Coordinacion de Accion Integral (CCAI) to integrate military, police, and civilian programs into a single, coordinated effort to restore an integral GOC presence in key conflict areas. The USG provided \$13.5 million to support CCAI activities in FY 2007, and plans to provide over \$10 million to CCAI activities for the Consolidation Plan for Macarena, Meta Department (PCIM), an area central to the fight against the FARC. The PCIM calls for an integrated, interagency effort to regain state control, foster economic development, and support civil society. CCAI programs initially suffered from interagency rivalries, but coordination has improved significantly of late. Though some human rights groups criticize CCAI for failing to involve local officials and civil society in its projects, the project has strong support in Meta. You will visit Macarena, which is the locus of current Colombian military operations against the FARC, and speak with military and civilian officials integral to the PCIM effort.

Challenges: Strengthening Economy, Security, Democracy

¶5. (SBU) Still, Colombia faces significant challenges as it consolidates the progress achieved to date. Combating inequality, fighting narcotrafficking, and promoting social-economic development will require substantial resources and attention in the years ahead. The GOC will look for the continued partnership and support of the United States, and will also seek regional allies to help it address these issues.

¶6. (SBU) In its relationship with the United States, ratification of the CTPA remains the Colombian government's highest economic priority. Analysts estimate the agreement with the United States would add between one and two percent annual GDP growth to the local Colombian economy, adding new jobs and contributing to President Uribe's goal of cutting the poverty rate from 45 percent to 35 percent by ¶2010. Colombia will also seek continued, but declining, U.S. security assistance as it achieves greater economic growth and social cohesion.

Regional Alliances and Tensions

¶7. (SBU) Colombia continues to ponder its role in the region, but a more secure, prosperous Colombia will play a more assertive role in Latin America and the world. Working with like-minded countries such as Mexico, Peru, and Chile, Colombia will seek to promote greater economic integration through the creation of a web of free trade agreements on the Americas' Pacific Coast. Colombia will avoid ideological confrontation with its Bolivarian neighbor due to their extensive border and economic ties, but we expect Colombia to be a pragmatic advocate for enhanced regional security cooperation and strengthened democratic institutions in the region.

¶8. (SBU) Colombia's commitment to free markets, democracy, and close relations with the United States are an exception to trends in the region. Following Colombia's March 1 air-strike killing FARC senior leader Raul Reyes across the border in Ecuador, Venezuela joined Ecuador in breaking relations and deployed military forces to its border. Venezuela called off the buildup after reaching agreement with Colombia March 7 to reduce tensions and reestablish commercial and diplomatic ties. Computers found in Raul Reyes' camp have information that appears to implicate Venezuelan and Ecuadorian government officials in providing support to the FARC, as well as a wider than thought international support network for the terrorist group. After months of strained relations, President Uribe and President Chavez met on July 11 and affirmed their commitment to improve ties, but tensions remain over Venezuela's ambiguous relations with the FARC. Ecuador and Colombia have yet to restore relations.

¶9. (SBU) Colombia also seeks to play a greater role in the international security architecture, as evidenced by its willingness to contribute troops to the NATO effort in Afghanistan. We expect the GOC to make available the expertise developed in combating the FARC for international peacekeeping efforts and other international security activities in the years ahead, although financial constraints will remain an issue.

U.S. Hostages

¶10. (SBU) An audacious Colombian military operation led to the rescue of three U.S. contractors and twelve Colombians held by the FARC. The three Americans were captured by the FARC in February 2003 and were the longest held U.S. hostages in the world at the time of their rescue. The Colombian government worked closely with us on hostage issues, and U.S. training of Colombian military personnel contributed to the operation's success. The FARC continues to hold 25 Colombian "political" hostages, as well as an estimated 700 economic hostages. The FARC is believed to continue to hold a U.S. citizen who was kidnapped in Panama in April 2008, and perhaps a Colombian-American dual national kidnapped in 2003, though it has never provided proof of life.

Human Rights Record

¶11. (SBU) The Uribe Administration continues to make progress on human rights cases involving military abuse or collaboration with paramilitaries. All members of the military and police receive mandatory human rights training. In October 2006, Defense Minister Santos named the first civilian -- and the first woman -- as director of the Military Criminal Justice System. Santos has strongly backed initiatives to deter extrajudicial killings, changing promotion criteria to favor demobilization or capture of illegal fighters, and ordering military personnel to facilitate civilian investigations of all combat deaths. Still, human rights groups allege that security forces committed 955 extrajudicial killings over the last five years.

U.S. Assistance

¶12. (SBU) In January 2007 the GOC presented a Plan Colombia "consolidation strategy" pledging a Colombian investment of \$78 billion through 2013. The proposal emphasizes the importance of building social cohesion, and allocates substantial resources to help strengthen local governance, protect human rights, and assist displaced people, Afro-Colombians, and indigenous communities. It also aims to reintegrate almost 48,000 demobilized ex-fighters and deserters and to promote Colombia's licit exports. The GOC seeks funding from the United States and European countries to complement its own resources.

¶13. (SBU) Under Plan Colombia, the USG has provided more than \$5 billion in assistance, including \$800 million in economic and social assistance. USG security assistance combats drug trafficking and terrorism through training, equipment, and technical assistance. It supports Colombian military aviation, essential for all programs - civilian or military - outside Colombia's major cities. U.S. social and economic aid focuses on alternative development, displaced and other vulnerable communities, human rights and democratic institutions, and reintegration of demobilized fighters.

Drug Eradication and Interdiction

¶14. (SBU) Eradication of coca and poppy crops and interdiction of cocaine and heroin reached near-record levels in 2007. President Uribe supports greater manual eradication, but recognizes that continued aerial eradication is also key. He seeks a complementary approach using both methods. In 2008, the Colombian National Police and military forces have set a brisk pace for cocaine, coca base and marijuana seizures, and are on pace to set a record. We work with the Colombian government to maximize our scarce resources to achieve the eradication and interdiction targets. We also continue our productive dialogue on how best to transfer key tasks from the USG to the GOC.

Extradition

¶15. (SBU) Since taking office, President Uribe has approved over 750 extraditions to the United States, including a record number of 164 in 2007. The Colombian Government has extradited over 119 criminals to the United States in 2008, including 15 former paramilitary leaders.

Demobilization and Peace Process

¶16. (SBU) Over 32,000 former paramilitaries have demobilized since 2002, and a further 16,000 have deserted from other illegal armed groups (about one-half from the FARC). The Organization of American States (OAS) estimates there are 30 new criminal groups numbering over 3000 members. Reintegration programs and targeted law enforcement are working to counter these groups. Under the

Justice and Peace Law (JPL) process, many former paramilitary leaders have confessed their participation in violent crimes. To date, the JPL process has revealed the location of the graves of almost 1,200 paramilitary victims and provided information on 3,600 crimes. Over 120,000 victims have registered under the JPL, with the GOC working on measures to accelerate payment of reparations. The Supreme Court and the Fiscalía--with GOC support--continue to investigate politicians with alleged paramilitary ties; 68 Congressmen, 23 mayors, and 14 governors have been implicated in the scandal.

¶17. (SBU) The National Liberation Army (ELN) has negotiated with the Colombian government for over two years on a cease-fire, but ELN infighting and FARC pressure have prevented a deal. The ELN kidnaps civilians to fund its operations, but its military capability is declining. The FARC has rebuffed GOC overtures to engage in meaningful peace talks, most recently rejecting GOC negotiator Luis Carlos Restrepo's efforts to establish direct talks earlier in July.

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